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# Tea Timing in Taste

by Harriett Beyer

**I**S THERE any custom more truly social than that of pausing in the midst of a busy day to join one's friends in drinking a cup of tea? Gathering in informal groups to relax and chat for a short time, just as the shadows begin to lengthen and the afternoon's round of activities draws to a close, is a most refreshing practice.

In small gatherings of intimate friends, tea service is very informal. It is perfectly appropriate, and indeed, pleasant, for the hostess to bring in tea and hot water and prepare the beverage while visiting with her guests. She may serve anything she desires to accompany the tea. Many people enjoy, better than anything else, paper-thin bread and butter sandwiches. Tiny hot biscuits with strawberry jam are delicious, and assorted cakes and cookies add variety. However, there are no rules regarding this sort of tea. The delightful thing about it is its informality.

Teas given in honor of visiting guests, brides or newcomers to the community are a delightful way to entertain either a large or small group of people. Invitations to an informal tea may be telephoned, or visiting cards with "At Home" followed by the date may be used to invite the guest. You could substitute: the date, "Tea" and the hour. Every invitation should tell what, where and when.

If the hostess is entertaining only a few friends, she may write an informal note saying, "Won't you come over for tea at four on Wednesday?" If she is inviting many guests, the invitation will cover two or two and one-half hours; that does not mean, of course, that one arrives at three and stays until five-thirty. A guest may arrive any time within the hours stated, but not later than twenty minutes before the last hour given. For instance if a tea is scheduled from three-thirty to five-thirty, guests do not plan to arrive later than ten minutes after five.

The service for a large tea is usually the best that the hostess has to offer. The most delicate china and the nicest silver are brought out. The tea table is arranged with flowers in the center, and candles may be used. Many hostesses will serve both tea and coffee,

or tea and chocolate, placing one at either end of the table. The food to be served is attractively arranged on plates and placed on both sides of the table, with the silver, plates for the guests, and napkins.



If the tea is a large one, the hostess will probably want to invite one or two of her friends to assist by pouring for her. The pourers must be persons of charm and poise; they have responsible positions in entertaining, for they speak to all who come to be served whether they have been introduced or not. Relieved of the responsibility of presiding at the tea table, the hostess is free to receive her guests and mingle with them.

On arriving at a tea, a guest greets the hostess and acknowledges introductions. If possible, she has removed her gloves before greeting the hostess, for while not a breach of etiquette, shaking hands with one's gloves on is not particularly cordial. If there are a good many guests, one probably will not know them all, but any guest may feel free to mix with anyone, whether or not an introduction has been made. The important thing is to be sociable and friendly.

Where there are many guests, the hostess or her assistants will probably not be able to take each guest to the tea table to be served, but will merely pass among the guests inviting them to go to the dining room and have tea. A guest will go to the tea table where she is served a cup of tea and invited to help herself to the delicacies which have been

prepared. It will not seem impolite for a guest to help herself to something of everything; the food has been prepared with this in mind, and it is a compliment to the hostess to show that her efforts are appreciated.

A guest may remain at a tea as long as courtesy and common sense dictate. She will undoubtedly not want to stay

less than twenty minutes or more than an hour. When she leaves she thanks the hostess, and if possible, says goodbye to the other members of the receiving line; however if it inconvenient for her to see them all, she does not need to do so.

A popular variation of teas is a program tea. For such an affair, musical selections or readings are planned. In this event, the hour at which the program is to begin is stated, and guests are expected to arrive before this hour.

Another is the silver tea, which is usually given to secure funds for some charitable.

The hostess leaves a pretty silver dish near the door where it is easily accessible, and the guests drop in contributions of silver.

The sit-down or high tea is another popular tea. It is a combination of afternoon tea and early supper, is served around four-thirty or five, and may follow an afternoon of bridge, dancing or skating.

Although the menu may be rather elaborate, this tea is informal and friendly. For comfort and convenience, covers are set or individual plates may be placed on small tables. Like the formal tea, it is usually served buffet style from the dining room table. Also like the formal tea, the handsomest cloth and centerpiece and best china glass and silverware are used.

The custom of serving tea has been given to us from England. There it is as much a part of the day's routine as are breakfast, lunch and dinner. Although it is not as generally adopted in the United States as in Great Britain, in many localities it is an everyday occurrence, and throughout the country it is a popular form of entertaining.

Large or small, simple or elaborate, teas are among the most friendly and sociable of entertainments, and both formal and informal teas have become extremely popular in American life.